

Motion Sickness

Traveler Summary

Summary

Anyone who's ever experienced a bout of motion sickness during ground, air, or water travel knows the feeling: vague discomfort becomes nausea, the face pales, and sweat beads form. Lightheadedness and exhaustion may be followed by vomiting. Some people are more prone to this condition than others, but factors such as turbulence, anxiety, and illness can also trigger motion sickness.

The human body has a delicate system of equilibrium that relies on fluids in the inner ear, visual sensors and other physical input to maintain a sense of balance. When incoming signals are in conflict—for example, when the body is at rest yet the eyes sense movement—this system is disturbed, causing the symptoms of motion sickness.

Preventive Behaviors

- 1 Eat lightly before and during travel. Don't drink alcohol.
- 1 Sit in the most stable section of a moving vehicle to decrease motion sickness symptoms. The best seats? Over the wings on an airplane; in the front seat of a car; near the front of trains; amidships, on deck if possible; and just forward of the midsection on buses.
- 1 Face forward and look out a window, keeping eyes fixed on the horizon or a stationary point in the distance. Stay as still as possible, and avoid any rapid head movement.
- 1 Sleep, if possible. If not, it may help to wear dark glasses or close eyes to reduce visual stimulation.

Medications for Prevention and Treatment

- 1 Antihistamines can prevent or relieve motion sickness. Because it is easier to prevent motion sickness than it is to stop it, medication should be taken 60 minutes before travel and continued during the trip. Four over-the-counter medications that are approved for this use in the U.S. are cyclizine (e.g., Marezine), dimenhydrinate (e.g., Dramamine), diphenhydramine (e.g., Benadryl), and meclizine (e.g., Bonine). Side effects may include drowsiness, dizziness or dry mouth. Antihistamines should not be used by anyone with glaucoma, breathing problems such as asthma, or urinary difficulties caused by an enlarged prostate. Check labels carefully for appropriate dosages, precautions and age restrictions.
- 1 Some people may require prescription drugs such as scopolamine if over-the-counter medications are not effective. This option should be discussed with a health care provider, including possible drug interactions.

Children

- 1 Children are more prone to motion sickness than adults are. For symptomatic treatment of motion sickness, dimenhydrinate or diphenhydramine may be considered. The first dose should be given 1 hour before travel and then every 6 hours. A test dose should be given in advance, as this medication can cause excitability rather than drowsiness in some children. The other advice that applies to adults is valid for kids, with 1 exception: the front seat of a car is not safe. Make sure children are secured in the back seat with a seat belt or child car seat. Give them sunglasses to wear, and make a game out of watching a fixed object on the horizon.

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